Frequently Asked Questions:

General

1. How do I find out what my property is zoned (i.e. residential, commercial, etc.)?

Kewaunee County is not comprehensively zoned so this information is not available from Kewaunee County Zoning. To find out what your property is zoned, you will need to contact the Town Zoning Administrator in which your property is located.

Private Onsite Wastewater Treatment Systems

1. How do I obtain a sanitary permit to install a septic system?

- The first step is to have a soil/site evaluation conducted by a certified soil tester. This test involves digging at least three soil pits/borings in a triangular shape so that the soil inside the triangle should be very similar to the soil observed in the test pits. The soil test identifies a suitable area to install a POWTS and determines the amount (inches) of suitable soil underneath the system.
- The second step is to have a plumber, engineer or system designer design a POWTS based on the findings of the soil test and the proposed use of the property. The use of the property is important because a residence will not have the same size system requirements as a commercial use and a four-bedroom residence will not have the same size system requirements as a two-bedroom residence. At this point you should also discuss the system sizing so the system can accommodate anticipated future additions to the residence. If your system is designed by an engineer or a system designer, you will also need to choose a plumber to install the system. A system that is designed by a plumber must be installed by that plumber.
- State Plan Approval of the POWTS design is required before the county can issue a sanitary permit for a mound, at-grade, in-ground pressure, or holding tank system.
- After the plans are approved, the installing plumber will apply for the sanitary permit at the county level.

2. What type of system can be installed on my property?

The only way to determine what type of system can be installed on a particular piece of land is to have the soil tested by a certified soil tester. The soil/site evaluation will indicate what type of system can be installed based on the soils and slope of the land. The test will also identify a location for the proposed system. The system must be installed within the area identified as suitable by the certified soil tester.

3. What are areas to avoid in constructing a septic system?

Conventional systems should not be installed in low areas or drainage ways since rain, storm runoff, and snowmelt will drain to those areas and saturate the soil. When the soil is saturated with surface water it cannot accept the additional load from the septic system. Groundwater leaking into the septic tank can also occur. Under these conditions, the system will not be able to accept the wastewater load and either backs up into the residence or breaks out to the surface. Both are unhealthy situations and must be corrected. It is also important to avoid areas with slopes greater than 25%. Effluent will often break out on the surface in these areas due to lateral flow through the soil. Compacted areas (driveways, parking lots, etc.) should also be avoided. The compaction of the soil will often change the soil structure reducing the rate that the soil can accept wastewater. These areas also allow frost to penetrate the soil more deeply and can cause a system to freeze during the winter. Once a system freezes, it cannot accept water until the soil thaws. Under this condition the septic tank must be used temporarily as a holding tank and must be pumped whenever it becomes full. Since a septic tank's capacity is generally much smaller than that of a holding tank's, pumping frequency is very high and can become quite expensive and very inconvenient.

4. What can I do to prolong the life of my septic system (mound, conventional, in-ground pressure or at-grade)?

- **Do not dispose of fats, greases, or cooking oils down any household drain**. The oils and greases will plug the soil pores and ultimately prevent the water from percolating into the soil.
- **Minimize your water usage** to prevent overloading of the system. A leaking plumbing fixture may add hundreds of gallons of water per day to the system. Run the dishwasher and washing machine only for full loads. Doing all the clothes washing in one day may overload the septic system. It is referred to as "surge loading" when you run six loads on Saturday and none the other days.
- **Do not use a garbage disposal** or at least minimize its use or design your septic system to accommodate it. Using the garbage disposal to dispose of bones, coffee grounds, coarse fruit or vegetable peelings or other products that are slow to biodegrade will cause the septic tank to fill much more quickly and require more maintenance to the system.
- **Do not dispose of automotive fluids, painting products or pesticides down the drain**. Gasoline, oil degreasers, paint thinners, etc. can kill the bacteria in the septic tank and result in an increase in the buildup of solids in the tank and cause a carryover into the drainfield. In addition, these products can accumulate in the soil and enter the groundwater to contaminate the water we drink.
- **Do not dispose of household disinfectants, antibiotics, and degreasers down the drain**. These can kill the bacteria in the septic tank and result in an

increase in the buildup of solids in the tank and cause a carryover into the drainfield. The carryover of solids will result in the plugging of the soil pores, which prevents the water from percolating into the soil.

- **Do not dispose of any non-biodegradable items down the drain**. These items include sanitary napkins or tampons, condoms, cotton swabs, cigarette butts, disposable diapers, infant wipes, etc. These items may plug sewer lines, baffles and drainfield perforations or lodge in the pump, and will certainly require additional maintenance for the system.
- **Do not connect any "clear water" sources** such as footing and foundation sump pumps to the private sewage system. Systems are not designed to handle such excessive water flows.
- **Surface water should be diverted away from the leach field** to prevent the area from being saturated by these waters. Otherwise, the surface water will compete with the effluent to percolate into the soil.
- **The water softener discharge should not go into the onsite system**. The calcium chloride is a form of salt. Salt accumulations within the drainfield may adversely affect the soil permeability and contribute to clogging of the soil pores.
- **Do not use chemicals to "start up" or "clean" your system**. They are unnecessary and may actually harm the system or the groundwater.

5. Are there any grants available to help pay for replacing my failing system?

The Wisconsin Fund - Private Onsite Wastewater Treatment System Replacement or Rehabilitation Financial Assistance Program is a state program that may help pay for a portion of the costs. To be eligible for the program the following conditions must be met:

- The system being replaced must have been in place and in use by July 1, 1978.
- The county must verify that you have a grant eligible failing system before the replacement begins.
- The house must be owner occupied (it cannot be a rental property). A small commercial establishment must be operated by the owner and have a daily wastewater flow rate less than 5,000 gallons per day.
- The family income of all owners of the residence must be less than $45,000 or the gross revenue of the small commercial establishment must be less than $362,500. (Grant awards for principal residences are reduced by $.30 for each $1.00 earned over $32,000.)
- The application for this program must be submitted within three years from the date of the verification of failure by the county.

The maximum grant available varies with the size and type of system being installed to meet the minimum code requirements.